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THE

EMOTION OF SYMPATHY:

A Metrical Essay,

READ BEFORE THE CAMBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION,
AT CAMBRIDGE, JULY 26TH, 1856.

BY WILLIAM WINTER.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY HENRY W. DUTTON AND SON,
33 AND 35 CONGRESS STREET.

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P R E F A C E .

SINCE this Poem was delivered, many persons—members of the “Cambridge High School Association,” and others—have expressed to me a desire that it might be published. For their gratification, and likewise for the pleasure of all who may happen to like it, I have issued this pamphlet. The Poem was, for the most part, written during the last summer, when I was ill in health, and at intervals snatched from severe study; and I shall hope it may be kindly received and considerately judged.

W. W.

Cambridge, October, 1856.

THE ARGUMENT.

A COMPARISON is made between the feelings of an exile on returning, after long absence in a foreign land, to that of his nativity, and the feelings, which, as old friends, we experience in assembling together after a long separation. These feelings, though different in degree, are similar in kind. An inquiry follows, as to the origin of such emotions; and to this inquiry an answer is returned, that we are to seek the explanation in that Law of Sympathy which God has ordained to govern the human race. The universality of this principle. Harmony of the natural universe. The soul's sympathy with God, and with all things beautiful in the creation as manifestations of God. Effects of natural scenery on the faculty of association. Our memories of the dead, and reflections of life present and future. Our admiration of beauty in woman, and the mutual sympathy of love. The true philosophy of life. A hope that, so long as we live, this bond of sympathy may unite us in pure friendship, and conduct us in pleasant ways to the end of this life, and onward to the eternity hereafter.

THE EMOTION OF SYMPATHY.

“ One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off, divine event
To which the whole creation moves.”

TENNYSON.

WHEN, after many a weary year has flown,
He turns from foreign climes to hail his own,
What soft emotions thrill the exile's heart !
What kindly tears of tender joy will start !
How from the past the shadowy shapes will rise,
While memory's pictures flit before his eyes ;
And every sound and every step betray
Remembered tokens of some happier day.

Here the old mansion where his early years —
Youth's rosy dawning flecked with silver tears —
Went by so smoothly, it would almost seem
As the mild memory of a pleasing dream.
Here a kind father reared his cherished boy ;
A mother's love here watched a mother's joy ;
The artless prattle of an infant voice,
Here waked their smiles and bade their hearts rejoice ;

And, day by day, they watched and strove to trace
The mind awakening in his youthful face ;
Upon his brow saw deeper thoughts arise
And wilder meaning tremble in his eyes ;
As various feeling variously exprest
The strife of nature in his little breast.

But Time went ceaselessly: joy's rosy hour
Grew dim with clouds, and storms began to lower.
New joys there were for him, but grief and pain
Taught their sad lesson — never learned in vain.
And, as with sober steps and much delay,
He moves along the unfrequented way,
On every side some little tokens tell
The sweet, old story, still remembered well.

Here, when a boy, he played, and here he met
Those cherished friends he never may forget.
Here a good mother taught him to be blest —
There is the churchyard where she lies at rest.
And other graves are there — names no less dear
Spring to his lips and claim the exile's tear.
Where those glad hearts, so joyful and so free —
The merry voices, only heard in glee —
The hands so warmly clasped — that plighted heart
With whom 'twas heaven to live, and death to part —
Where are they all? Alas, the echoes say,
These things have been, but these are past away.

'Tis evening now, and, in the western sky,
Deep drawn the tints of God's own splendor lie.
Soft are the airs that stir the rustling grain,
And sweet the odors rising from the plain.

But not for him is beauty's veil withdrawn
Whose heart is lonely and whose hope is gone.
The blended hues that tint the glowing west
With the rich crimson flush of virgin breast ;
The liberal fragrance of the scented air,
That cools the brow and lifts the waving hair ;
The leaves, low whispering, when the silver light
Of the young moon streams through the startled night,
And all the beauty of the earth is spread,
With that of heaven, around and overhead—
All these but turn his tender thoughts to pray
For what once was, but now has passed away.

So here to-day we come, and memory's spell
Wakes thoughts which human language cannot tell.
Gathered in friendship here,— not sad, like him—
No heart beats coldly and no eyes are dim.
The joyful greeting and the glad reply,
Hope in each heart and life in every eye,—
These tell a different tale, for these declare
No lingering sorrow that is like despair.
And yet, full sadly must our hearts avow
Some *were* with us who are not with us now.
Thoughts of the dead are always sad, and yet,
Those we have loved we never can forget.
Kind eyes look sweetly through the shadowy gloom,
And mournful voices whisper from the tomb,
While, with low tone and mildly pensive eye,
We speak their names whose doom has been to die.

To-day the starlight of affection falls
In memory's cloisters and her storied halls,

And scenes of pleasure past, and scenes of pain,
 In that mild lustre wake to life again ;
 Old days come back, remembered joys assume
 The virgin freshness of their earlier bloom ;
 All hearts are glad, and even the brow of care
 Wears the rich glow it once was used to wear :
 In every heart a sense of pleasure lives,
 And friendship gladdens by the joy it gives :
 While reigns o'er all — now worldly trials cease —
 The gentle spell of pure and heavenly peace.

Whence flows this tide of feeling ? whence arise
 These kindly thoughts, and, too, these pensive sighs ?
 What mystic influence thus controls the mind,
 To vice repugnant and to virtue kind ?
 Scatters all blessings where the good have trod,
 And lives from man to man, and thus from man to God ?

In the beginning, when the Eternal's word
 Pealed from his throne and startled chaos heard,
 Confusion changed and grew beneath his eye
 To perfect concord and sweet harmony.
 Fast fly the trembling shades, and now arise
 The morning glories born of Paradise !
 Rich floods of light the formless void reveal,
 And shapes appear, and gradual beauties steal.
 The stately orbs in solemn silence pace
 Their circling courses through the eternal space ;
 A perfect system circumscribes the whole,
 And God the union is, and God the soul.

So harmony pervades the general plan,
 But finds perfection in the soul of man.

The stars may burn—the moons may wax and wane—
 The circling seasons pass and come again—
 But all these changes, beauteous though they be,
 Can faintly type the eternal unity.
 But, in the mighty human soul, we find
 Some index of the universal mind.

Of what avail the various force of man
 Life to explore and nature's God to scan?
 Fair science fails, and reason cannot stray
 Beyond the precincts of her trivial day;
 Else all is dark, the ocean and the sky—
 Loud rings her challenge, but there's no reply!
 But, in the promptings of the soul, we know
 His power, who made and governs all below;
 And Nature's voice, to those who comprehend,
 Gives blessed assurance of one steadfast friend.
 Go ask the ocean bursting on the shore—
 It answers proudly with its hollow roar;
 Ask the broad Heaven, and all your murmurs cease—
 Its calm brow awes you into perfect peace.
 The stars come forth, in golden beauty shine,
 And sweetly whisper of the life divine.
 In all that thrills the ear or meets the eye,
 There lives a beauty which is mystery;
 And thus by silent influence they show
 What reason cannot teach and does not know.

Take here your stand when night is coming down,
 And dusky shadows wrap the silent town;
 Erewhile the dying sun flushed all the west
 With his rich crimson blood, and sunk to rest.

But now the moon a gentler light distils,
And silence broods o'er all the misty hills ;
Soft through the trees the wind of evening sighs,
And soft the murmurs of the sea arise ;
Far up the beach, spread forth on either hand,
The moonlit water beats the silver sand ;
Light wreaths of foam curl up with snowy sheen,
And music thrills the air, and charms the heavenly scene.

Or come when midnight clothes the dusky hill,
And the dark forest slumbers deep and still ;
Save—as the restless sleeper heaves a sigh—
The brown leaves murmur when the winds sweep by ;
And the pure stars, with holy lustre bright,
Shed their rich glory o'er the peaceful night.
There the calm river slowly glides away ;
Along this plain the sleeping hamlets lay ;—
The small, white houses couched upon the plain,
The meadows rough with sheaves of golden grain ;—
Some little spires here rise and intervene—
There the low, misty hills close round and shut the scene.

What gentle thoughts, what tender memories rise,
When scenes like these engage our raptured eyes !
How throned the silent years, how rise amain
The phantom shapes of pleasure and of pain !
How fondly do our memories haste to dwell
With those dear ones whom we have loved so well !
How ardently our longing souls recall
Whom death has taken from this being's thrall !
And then how gradual and how sure the pause
To ponder of God's government and laws ;

To ask of brighter, happier worlds than this
And awful secrets of the dark abyss !
Thus all that 's beautiful, or soon or late,
Leads us to question of a future state.

What do we live for ? whence these hopes and fears
Which nerve us to the conflict of our years ?
What after all remains, when life is sped,
And man is gathered to the silent dead ?
Home to the narrow house and long, long sleep,
Where pain is stilled and sorrow doth not weep.

Tossed on the ever-ebbing tide of time —
A stream resistless, rapid and sublime —
One moment seen, man flits from wave to wave,
Then sinks forever in the treacherous grave :
Sinks, and is seen no more ; no more is known,
Sleeps the dark, dreamless sleep, unmourned but not alone.

What then remains to tell that he hath been ?
What record shows his virtue or his sin ?
What power reviews the life which ebbs away,
Bursts the thick darkness and leads on the day ?
Adjusts the balance, weighing every deed, —
Was evil spurned or virtue doomed to bleed ?
Did he great objects in his life attain,
Or was existence given him in vain ?
And this to answer, summons to its place
Each thought, each action of his earthly race ;
Applies them all, and, to the general plan,
Makes one subservience of the life of man ?

Perplexing questions! How shall we decide?
 Invoke what counsel and entreat what guide?
 Life unexplored, is Hope's perpetual blaze—
 When past, one long, involved and darksome maze;
 But, that some mighty power controls the whole,
 A secret intuition tells the soul.
 No longer then in wandering doubt to grieve,
 We cannot demonstrate, but yet believe!

If he one generous act performed on earth;
 If to one noble thought he ere gave birth;
 If one kind word to suffering weakness given,
 Fell from his lips as manna fell from heaven;
 If ere his eye one pitying tear distilled;
 One throb of sympathy his heart has thrilled;
 If he hath bowed beneath the chastening rod,
 Forgive the weakness of a child of God!
 Spare, spare the follies of an erring brain,
 Judge not his faults—he has not lived in vain.

Behold—I speak it with a struggling sigh—
 The tender beauty of that soft blue eye!
 See all the soul informed with modest grace,
 Suffuse that eye and mantle in that face:
 The rosy cheek behold, the damask glow,
 The soft, warm lips, the pearly teeth below:
 Lips, that with words move slightly now apart,—
 Words—music, gushing from her gentle heart:
 See the full bust, the fairly rounded arm,
 The tapering figure and the *peering* charm;—
 What lends that mystic grace? what thrills the soul?
 The nameless mystery that enshrouds the whole;

That mystery which wakes, whene'er it will,
The natural throb, the sympathetic thrill.

Shall woman's love — of mother, sister, wife,
The richest blessing of this mortal life —
Receive no tribute, humble though it be,
For so much truth and so much purity?
No! while the heart can feel, or lips can speak,
Our words shall fail not though our words *are* weak:
Weak to express what bends each noble soul
In mild submission to its sweet control;
Which smooths each wrinkle from the brow of care,
And sets eternal youth in beauty there;
Makes life a rosy landscape opening wide,
And lights the waters of death's dismal tide.
For as sometimes, the murky clouds between,
The moonlight falls, a quiet holy sheen,
So Love illumes the wild and awful way
With golden splendors of the rising day;
Pierces the gloom of death and points the road
To our celestial home, and God's divine abode.

Content with this our lives might glide along
Smoothly and sweetly as a dying song.
In vain we seek to know our future fate,
And scarcely comprehend our present state.
But this we know — that, while our hearts are pure,
Our lives are happy and our peace is sure.
Though sorrow's tears may sometimes dim the eye,
Love dries the tear and checks the lingering sigh.
And while this world such varied beauties bless —
Rare youthful grace and maiden loveliness,

Stern manhood's power and noble woman's charm,
 All pain to sooth and every care disarm ;—
 While friendship glistens in the happy eye ;
 While Hope remains — and Hope should never die !
 While there 's one cheek from which to wipe the tear,
 One lonely heart to cherish and to cheer ;
 While there 's on earth one noble deed to do,
 We sin to murmur at the good and true !
 For all things are of God to mortal man —
 His the high law and his the heavenly plan !

* * * * *

And now Farewell ! Too long my serious lay
 Detains you from the pleasures of the day.
 May love and peace and joy with you abide,
 Nor this, my earnest wish, be ere denied :
 When cold experience chills the heart of youth,
 While life reveals its stern and naked truth ;
 When these bright eyes which gleam before me now,
 Grow dim beneath each worn and furrowed brow ;
 When maiden grace and matron bloom decay,
 And manhood's strength is wasted quite away ;
 Then may one noble purpose still remain,
 One memory soothe us and one hope sustain :
 One glorious hope, that, when the end shall come,
 And God, our father, call his children home,
 Our souls on angel wings may take their way
 Up to the mansions of eternal day !

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